



ACCESS CURRENTS

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Advisory Panel on the 508 Standards Refresh Holds Meeting

The Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee (TEITAC), which will provide recommendations on updating the Board's accessibility criteria for electronic and information technology and telecommunications products, held its third meeting February 6 – 8 in the Washington, D.C. area. The Committee is reviewing standards for electronic and information technology procured by Federal agencies issued under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and guidelines used to enforce the Telecommunications Act.



At the meeting, members received updates on the work of subcommittees and deliberated on Committee goals.

A key item on the agenda was discussion of the Committee's goals in reviewing the design requirements and how its recommendations should be presented to the Board. The Committee also explored a new framework for the section 508 standards that could facilitate future updating on a regular basis, which is considered necessary due to the ever-changing nature of the technologies covered and the regular emergence of new technologies and innovations. Consideration was given to a two-part structure for the standards consisting of a set of general access principles that would remain relatively constant and a separate section comprised of detailed technology or product specific criteria that would be revisited and updated periodically by the Board as needed.

As with previous meetings, the agenda included briefings on different aspects of accessibility and section 508's implementation. To provide background on how the section 508 standards are used by Federal agencies in the procurement process, representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, the Social Security Administration, and the Internal Revenue Service held a panel discussion on strategies for assessing product compliance. Members also heard a presentation on cognitive impairments and the design of information technology from an invited speaker, Professor Clayton Lewis of the University of Colorado and the Coleman Institute, and a briefing on interoperability of assistive and information technologies.

Subcommittee sessions were also held during the meeting. There are eight subcommittees organized by the Committee at its first meeting that are focused on different subject areas such as web and software, audio/video, telecommunications, and general interface. Subcommittees typically deliberate and share information in between full committee meetings. Subcommittee chairs provided progress reports to the full committee on the final day of the meeting.

For further information, visit the committee's website at <http://teitac.org> or contact Timothy Creagan of the Access Board at creagan@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0016 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY). Information on the committee and its meetings is also posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/sec508/update-index.htm.

Board Holds Roundtable on Updating Bus Guidelines

On January 10, 2007, the Board held an industry roundtable discussion on issues to address in the update of its accessibility guidelines for transportation vehicles issued under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These guidelines, which were first published in 1991, cover access to buses, vans, rail cars, and other modes of public transportation. The Board plans to update these guidelines to address new or variant forms of service, such as bus rapid transit.

The recent meeting brought together industry representatives, including bus operators and the manufacturers of buses, vehicle ramps and lifts, and securement devices. Discussion focused on trends in the design of buses, boarding devices, and mobility aids, such as the increasing variety of wheelchairs and powered mobility aids on the market, the prevalence of low floor buses, and other innovations in the design of vehicles and boarding devices. Issues raised in public forums the Board held last year in Washington, D.C. and Las Vegas were explored as they pertain to boarding access and securement devices.

Based on the input of this latest meeting, as well as the previous forums, the Board plans to prepare draft revisions to the bus guidelines that will be made available for public comment. A follow-up draft will be prepared to cover other parts of the guidelines, including specifications for rail cars. The Board is scheduled to hold a forum on this update at New Jersey's TransAction 2007 Transportation Conference and Expo, in Atlantic City on April 12th. For more information, contact Dennis Cannon at cannon@access-board.gov (email), (202) 272-0015 (v), or (202) 272-0081 (TTY).

Research Completed on the Visibility of Detectable Warnings

A study on the visibility of detectable warnings was recently completed that provides recommendations on color and contrast. Funded by the Federal Highway Administration at the request of the Board, the project used subject testing to determine which color qualities were most visible to people with limited vision. This information will be useful to the Board in the development of guidelines for public rights-of-way, as well others involved in specifying detectable warning products.

Detectable warnings are used to alert people with vision impairments to hazardous drop-offs, such as those along rail station platforms, and to curb-less transitions from sidewalks to streets. ADA design requirements specify a distinctive surface patterning of flat-top domes which previous research has shown to be most detectable by cane or under foot. Existing specifications, which are under review by the Board as part of its work developing new rights-of-way guidelines, also call for a contrast in color between the detectable warning and the surrounding surface for the benefit of those with residual vision.

The new study, unlike most of the previous research on detectable warnings, focused exclusively on visual detection. With 50 test subjects, most of whom were legally blind, researchers tested and compared the effectiveness of 13 colors and patterns against several simulations of common sidewalk surfaces (white and brown concrete, gray asphalt, and red brick). Results of the study underscore the effectiveness of high contrast between warning and sidewalk surfaces. To ensure adequate visual detection, the study recommends a minimum luminance contrast (60%) and a minimum reflectance for the lighter color. The most effective warning colors, according to the results, include federal yellow (against dark adjacent surfaces), brick red (against light surfaces), and black-and-white color combinations which provided internal contrast. The research report, "Visual Detection of Detectable Warning Materials by Pedestrians with Visual Impairments," is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/research/dw-fhwa/report.htm.



DOT Seeks Comment on New Regulations for Vessel Operators

The U.S. Department of Transportation has proposed new regulations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure access to vessels for passengers with disabilities. Published on January 23, the proposal, which is available for public comment for three months, ensures access to programs and services provided by vessel operators and prohibits discriminatory practices and policies. The regulations would apply to vessels of all types and sizes that provide transportation or other services to the public, including cruise ships, ferries, water taxis, gaming and excursion boats and other types of craft.

The rule bans practices that discriminate on the basis of disability, such as denial of service, program restrictions, and price discrimination, and specifies conditions upon which certain policies, such as advance notice of the need for accessible accommodations, would be considered acceptable. It also covers responsibilities for ensuring access to vessel services and programs, including accommodation of mobility aids, assistive devices and service animals, as well as access to landside facilities serving vessels, such as terminals and floating docks. The rule highlights certain issues and questions where public feedback is sought. Comments on DOT's rule are due by April 23, 2007. Additional information, including received comments, is posted on DOT's site at <http://dms.dot.gov/reports/fr.htm> (see "ADA - Passenger Vessels" under the heading "OST").

The proposed rule does not include design requirements for vessels, which are currently under development by the Board. As explained in the notice, DOT plans to incorporate the Board's future guidelines for vessels into its rule. The Board is preparing a proposed version of the guidelines that will be published for public comment at a future date.

Board Provides Feedback on Local Memorial Designs

The Board regularly provides guidance and input on the accessibility of designs for various high-profile sites and landmarks. In December, the Board met with representatives of the new American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial to be built in Washington off Capitol Hill to provide feedback on the project's accessible features. The Board also provided input on the Pentagon Memorial Project commemorating victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and designs for a new justice center in Denver. Such informal consultations are just one of ways in which the Board serves the public in order to promote access and compliance.



Representatives of the new memorial for disabled veterans use a model to brief the Board on the project's design.

Technical Assistance and Training. Through its technical assistance and training programs, the Board provides guidance and instruction on all of its guidelines and standards. Last year, the Board responded to over 13,000 technical inquiries submitted through its help line or by email and fax. The Board routinely conducts training sessions at various events across the country. Often, these sessions are part of larger programs organized by different groups and associations. Training events are tailored to the particular interests and information needs of each audience. The Board conducts about a hundred training sessions each year.

Enforcement. Concerned about access to a facility? The Board enforces standards for federally funded facilities under the Architectural Barriers Act through the investigation of complaints. It investigated almost 200 complaints last year, and access issues were successfully remedied in all cases where the law applied (and in some cases voluntarily where it didn't). Filing a complaint with Board is simple and can be done through its website, or by mail, email, or fax.

(continued next page)

(continued from page 3)

Publications. The Board distributes an array of free information an accessible design, including copies of its guidelines and standards, technical bulletins, and design guides. Publications can be ordered or downloaded through the Board's website at www.access-board.gov.

For more information on Board services, contact the Board at (800) 872-2253 (v), (800) 993-2822 (TTY), (202) 272-0081 (fax) or send an email to: info@access-board.gov (general inquiries), ta@access-board.gov (technical assistance), training@access-board.gov (training), enforce@access-board.gov (ABA enforcement), or pubs@access-board.gov (publications).

The Board Seeks Visitor Feedback on its Website

The Board seeks your input on ways to improve its website at www.access-board.gov. Please visit the site and take the user-satisfaction survey that automatically pops up. The feedback you provide will be of great assistance to the Board in further improving the site to better serve users. No personal information is collected in this survey.



Justice Department Publishes Guidance on ADA Compliance

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is preparing guidance material for use by state and local governments in complying with the ADA. The "ADA Best Practices Tool Kit" provides guidance on identifying barriers to access in government programs, services, activities, and facilities and how to correct them. The first installment, released in December, provides an overview of the ADA and relevant regulations. A second section covers notice and grievance procedures and includes a compliance checklist and sample notices and policies. The information is posted on DOJ's website at www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/pcatoolkit/abouttoolkit.htm. Additional installments will be posted throughout the year as they become available.

Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

Volume 13 No. 1 January/ February 2007

Page 4



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